



**VIA E-MAIL**

Rebecca Hume, Village Clerk  
Village of Arlington Heights  
Email: rhume@vah.com

**Re: Strengthening Village Ethics Policy**

I write on behalf of Americans for Prosperity – Illinois (“AFP-IL”), a 501(c)(4) nonpartisan organization concerned about the potential use of corporate welfare for the proposed Chicago Bears stadium development in the Village of Arlington Heights. Corporate welfare diverts public resources from people who need them, leads to higher taxes, and undermines trust in public institutions.

The Village recently encountered this lack of trust when an [Arlington Heights resident accused](#) the Village Board of taking kickbacks from the Chicago Bears.<sup>1</sup> While no Arlington Heights official should be accused of such behavior without hard evidence, citizens and taxpayers have good reason to be concerned. Recent history is filled with examples of government officials giving massive taxpayer subsidies to sports stadium developments and then receiving kickbacks or special benefits like free access to luxury suites for events.<sup>2</sup> But Arlington Heights can protect its reputation with an updated ethics policy that prohibits these special benefits that plague other stadium developments.

The Village’s [2004 ordinance](#)<sup>3</sup> and [Chapter 7.9](#) of the Employee Handbook prohibit the acceptance of gifts by elected officials and employees of the Village. Chicago has similar ordinance language, but the Chicago Ethics Board was still required to issue opinions on discrete issues. AFP-IL is concerned that without specific, updated guidance there will be ambiguity on what is prohibited. Therefore, we encourage the Village Board to ensure there are strong ethics protections in place by clearly prohibiting:

- The acceptance of free or reduced-price tickets or luxury suite access to stadium events, including but not limited to Soldier Field and a potential Bears stadium development in Arlington Heights;
- The acceptance of non-public access to face value tickets for high-profile games, such as the playoffs or the Super Bowl;
- The acceptance of free or reduced-price tickets or luxury suite access to stadium events for official Village business such as economic development.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact me at [bcostin@afphq.org](mailto:bcostin@afphq.org). Thank you for your attention to this matter.

/s/ Brian Costin

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BRIAN COSTIN  
DEPUTY STATE DIRECTOR, AFP-IL

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<sup>1</sup> Bernie Tafoya, *Arlington Heights officials deny taking payoffs from Bears*, 670 The Score, Mar. 23, 2023 <https://www.audacy.com/670thescore/sports/chicago-bears/arlington-heights-officials-deny-taking-payoffs-from-bears>.

<sup>2</sup> See examples on page 2 below.

<sup>3</sup> See Ordinance No. 04-032.

## **History of Government Officials Reaping Benefits from Subsidized Stadium Developments**

Chicago Bears President and CEO Kevin Warren previously served as the Minnesota Vikings COO who oversaw the negotiation and construction of their taxpayer subsidized stadium. Government officials who oversee the Vikings stadium [on behalf of taxpayers](#) received “free tickets to two lower-level luxury suites for all events held there.”<sup>4</sup>

These problems have been a recurring theme in Chicago, where the Board of Ethics issued multiple opinions about city officials receiving free, discounted, or face value tickets to high-profile sporting events.<sup>5</sup> In 2017, the Chicago Board of Ethics informed city council members and department heads that they would be [in violation](#) of the City’s Governmental Ethics Ordinance if they accepted an offer from the Chicago White Sox of 2 tickets and a cocktail reception at the White Sox home opener that year.<sup>6</sup>

**[Work or perk? U.S. Bank Stadium executives have free access to luxury suite seats](#)** (Star Tribune, Nov. 28, 2016)

“The government appointees who oversee U.S. Bank Stadium on behalf of taxpayers get a perk unavailable to most Minnesotans: free tickets to two lower-level luxury suites for all events held there. The suites are for marketing purposes but, they admit, friends and family are often in attendance. Taxpayers covered almost \$500 million of the \$1.1 billion cost of the stadium, but the public cannot find out who gets those 36 suite seats each game. The Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority (MSFA) members decline to say who joins them for complimentary food, beer and, in some cases, free parking in the same lot reserved for Vikings players and coaches.”

**[Phoenix council members used city suite to watch NBA Finals, concerts](#)** (Axios Phoenix, Dec. 19, 2022)

“Four city council members attended Suns games or concerts using a city suite that is supposed to be for community and economic development purposes, according to [records obtained by Axios Phoenix](#). Why it matters: Ethics experts tell us that council members taking advantage of perks like this can create the perception that the city is misusing a public resource for private benefit, which diminishes trust between elected officials and constituents.”

**[Atlanta ethics board: No free Falcons tickets, suites for city workers](#)** (Fox5 Atlanta, Sept. 22, 2017)

“No city workers can get free tickets or suites to Falcons games, even if they conduct “business meetings,” the Atlanta Board of Ethics decided publicly Thursday night. The decision ended a controversy over ethics at City Hall, where business development arm Invest Atlanta argued in July, some city leaders should be granted access to premium seating at the new Mercedes-Benz Stadium to lure business investors to Atlanta.”

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<sup>4</sup> Rochelle Olson, *Work or perk? U.S. Bank Stadium executives have free access to luxury suite seats*, Star Tribune, Nov. 28, 2016, <https://m.startribune.com/work-or-perk-u-s-bank-stadium-executives-have-free-access-to-luxury-suite-seats/403153766/>.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g., [Case No. 10021.A](#), [Case No. 16032.A](#), [Case No. 17014.A](#).

<sup>6</sup> William F. Conlon, *Case No. 17014.A Invitation from the Chicago White Sox to attend the Home Opener*, April 3, 2017, City of Chicago Board of Ethics, Mar. 13, 2017, <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/ethics/general/2017/17014.A.pdf>.

[D.C. Government's Event Tickets Record Keeping Remains Incomplete](#) (NBC4 Washington, Aug. 26, 2016)

“Washington, D.C.’s mayor and the D.C. Council are receiving another round of scrutiny over their usage of special suite tickets at the Verizon Center and Nationals Park. D.C.’s top elected officials have long been given access to a cache of private suite seats at the two major event complexes, through agreements reached years ago.”

[City Trades Its Yankee Stadium Suite for Cash](#) (New York Times, Jan. 6, 2009)

“The city’s acquisition of the Yankees suite had drawn scrutiny, especially after e-mail messages surfaced in November showing that aides to Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg had zealously pursued the luxury box, as well as free food and access to post-season games... ‘The taxpayers who are paying for the construction of Yankee Stadium cannot afford to buy tickets for the games, but the mayor was getting a luxury box, so he had to back off,’ he said in an interview on Tuesday.”